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# Connecticut Yankee

## OUTRAGEOUS GOOD FORTUNE

By Michael Burke.  
Illustrated. 422 pp. Boston:  
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\$19.95.

By Lawrence S. Ritter

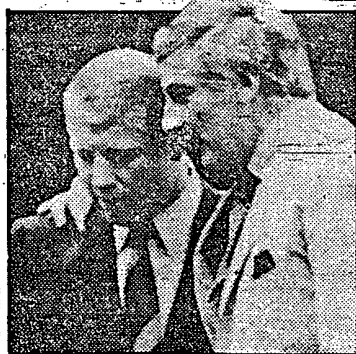
**J**UST one of Michael Burke's many careers would be more than enough for any ordinary person. A middle-class youngster of Irish descent, born and raised in Connecticut, he became accustomed to the spotlight early in life as a star running back on the University of Pennsylvania's top-ranked football team. The start of World War II found him unhappily selling insurance, but before the war was over he was parachuting behind German lines to work with the French underground. After the war, he wound up in Hollywood working as a technical adviser on cloak-and-dagger films, from which it was a natural sequel to spend a number of years abroad as a real-life spy — an undercover operative in the employ of the C.I.A.

Soon after returning to the United States in 1954, Mr. Burke accepted the job of running the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Then he joined the Columbia Broadcasting System as vice president in charge of acquisitions, and after acquiring the New York Yankees for CBS in 1964, he became president of the baseball team.

A decade later he bought the Yankees himself, along with George Steinbrenner, but the two could not get along, and Mr. Burke decided leaving was better than ulcers. He became the president of the Madison Square Garden Corporation, which also owns the Rangers hockey team and the Knickerbockers basketball team. A couple of years ago, approaching the age of 65, he astonished everyone who knew him by suddenly resigning from Madison Square Garden and retiring to County Galway, Ireland, where he still lives.

With this sort of material at his fingertips, Mr. Burke could hardly write a dull autobiography. In fact, he has turned out a sparkling one, filled with behind-enemy-lines derring-do, confrontations with Jimmy Hoffa and his Teamsters, skirmishes with George Steinbrenner and his minions, encounters with Eleanor Roosevelt and her children and nights on the town with the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Kim Philby and Reggie Jackson. This extraordinary range of people and events insures something of interest for just about every kind of reader.

Every autobiography is more or less self-serving, of course, and Mr. Burke's is no exception. By and large, he sees himself as an effective administrator, a good friend who can be counted on when needed, a genial drinking buddy and a man with a social conscience and a well-honed sense of equity and fair play — in general, an all-around prince of a fellow. It is clear, however, that ambition has played an important role in his life, more so, perhaps, than he likes to acknowl-



Michael Burke, right, with Mickey Mantle at ceremonies for Mantle's retirement, Yankee Stadium, 1969.

edge. Like most compulsive overachievers, he repeatedly sacrificed family considerations on the altar of career advancement. We learn a lot about personal rewards, but human costs are barely mentioned.

**I**N general, Mr. Burke was good for baseball and the New York Yankees. However, many fans will never forgive him for ruthlessly firing Red Barber, generally considered the best play-by-play announcer of all time, after Mr. Barber properly called attention to the sparse attendance (413 paying customers) in Yankee Stadium one dreary September afternoon in 1966. We never learn whether Mr. Burke has ever had second thoughts about the firing, since he never mentions Mr. Barber. It would have been nice if he had admitted his misjudgment and offered a belated apology to Mr. Barber and New York's baseball fans. That's what Mr. Burke's idealized alter ego would have done, anyway. □

Lawrence S. Ritter teaches finance at New York University and is the author of "The Glory of Their Times" and a children's book, "The Story of Baseball."